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POLISH MEDICAL AID PROJECT

Background

Since the successful stand taken by the Gomulka regime against Soviet intervention last fall, the internal situation in Poland has differed radically from that of the other countries within the Soviet sphere. The regime has been and continues to be balanced on a political knife edge, prodded by the Kremlin toward Communist discipline on one side and resisted on the other by the Polish people, grimly determined at least to maintain the measure of individual liberty already gained. There is no doubt of the anti-Soviet, anti-Communist solidarity of the people nor of their full understanding that Poland's bargaining position vis-a-vis the U.S.S.R. depends on the ever-present threat of full scale revolt.

Since the regime for months has not dared to use the police to supply the traditional communist fear incentives in the political and economic spheres, the government's authority is precarious, vital public services in such areas as health and education are impaired and the "planned economy" has simply fallen apart.

Every Polish paper, every American correspondent and every traveler returned from Poland testify to the fact that in this situation the Polish people are looking for aid from the West, specifically from the U.S. As in the case of the Hungarian people last fall, Poles are not asking for or expecting miracles. As in Hungary, morale is all important, and again as in Hungary, our action or inaction is decisive with respect to at least one vital element entering into morale - the sense of security and kinship produced by aid in the form of deeds and not words alone.

The Administration has responded to the appeals of the Polish Government with a substantial program which has now apparently cleared the last major Congressional hurdle. But here, as is so often the case, \$1 worth of private voluntary aid given spontaneously and from the heart is worth \$10 of Government farm surplus or credits for coal machinery.

The Need

The three most critical shortages in an absolutely desperate public health situation in Poland are properly trained medical personnel, medical and research equipment, and medicines. The Ford and Rockefeller foundations have announced programs designed in a modest way to assist principally in the first two of these areas. Little or nothing is yet being done to remedy the critical situation in medicines, although C.A.R.E. and presumably other agencies hope before long to do what they can on a scale strictly limited by available funds. In a year or two the medicine situation will improve, as Polish sources are beginning to be developed. Right now the need is great and so is the opportunity.

C - O - P - Y

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Page Two

The Opportunity

If a number of American pharmaceutical manufacturers would agree to make available substantial quantities of antibiotics, vitamins and other acutely needed medicines, a program of direct shipments of this form of aid to hospitals, clinics and doctors in Poland appears practicable. The duty on drugs has recently been eliminated. The Rectors of the ten Polish medical schools might be asked to determine allocations. (These individuals enjoy great prestige because they were elected by their faculties this year for the first time in many years.) Enthusiastic State Department support for such a project is probable. Interference by the Gomulka regime is not likely. The impact on Polish public opinion would unquestionably be tremendous.

The Program

A prominent manufacturer should take the lead in securing the support of the others, using whatever techniques seem appropriate. Each company's contribution would be drawn up in the light of known needs, shipments to be made over a period of six months to a year, depending on the quantities made available.

The International Rescue Committee can serve as the tax-exempt donee, provide all necessary technical advice on shipments and set up the system of allocations. Naturally there would be complete cooperation with the sponsoring company (or companies) in the public relations aspects of the program as well. Enthusiastic public endorsement of the program by high officials in Washington can be expected.

The International Rescue Committee believes that this program would not only be of great humanitarian value, but would represent a truly significant and direct contribution by an American industry in the front lines of the world struggle for freedom.

John Richardson, Jr.

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